

CONNOR JESSUP

Press Kit

‘AMERICAN CRIME’ Just Delivered the Most Powerful Scene on TV This Season



ABC’s *American Crime* returned for its second season this month, with a brand new story starring many of the same actors as last season. And while last season was well-reviewed and earned an Emmy Award for Regina King, it didn’t exactly attach itself to the zeitgeist the way other TV shows did. I’m really hoping this season allows the show to make that leap in viewership and attention, because it’s some of the best-made and most compelling TV on air, and Wednesday night’s episode featured what I’m going to have no problem calling the best scene on television this season.

Which isn’t to say the scene isn’t hard to watch. The second season of *American Crime* concerns itself with a rape allegation within the confines of an elite private school. The rape victim is a high-school boy, Taylor (Connor Jessup), who was assaulted at a party attended by members of the school’s basketball team. Near the beginning of the second episode, Connor’s mom (Lili Taylor) brings him in to the hospital to be examined.

The show’s depiction of a rape-kit exam is dynamic. The camera stays exclusively on Taylor’s face, no matter who’s talking. The voice work by the otherwise unseen medical professional is practiced and patient and unalarming, bearing the kind of tone you’d imagine real-life examiners go through much training to attain. This is both comforting (as a viewer you want *desperately* for Taylor not to be further traumatized, and it’s a kindness to know this woman won’t be doing that) and horrifying (that this kind of thing happens often enough for someone to be so practiced at it). Keeping the camera fixed on Taylor also puts Connor Jessup’s empathetic performance into focus. Jessup impressed me when I saw him in an indie film called *Closet Monster* at last year’s Toronto Film Festival. That film should have a release date soon, by which point we all may well be talking about Jessup having given one of TV’s best performances. He’s certainly on his way.

What’s fantastic about *American Crime* this year is its holistic approach to a horrific incident. Scenes like the rape-kit exam place us with Taylor, but the show steps into the lives of many characters — the school principal (Felicity Huffman), trying to serve the needs of the school while wrestling her conscience; the basketball coach (Timothy Hutton) whose first (only?) instinct is to protect his players; multiple students and players on the team; Regina King and Andre Benjamin as parents of the school’s best athlete, who are dealing with a multitude of pressures as the parents of a black boy in a white environment. There are no angels and no devils on this show, and the multitude of perspectives only serves to dig the audience deeper into the story of the crime.

The show isn’t perfect. There’s a kind of parlor game being played through at least the first few episodes about which characters might be gay and whether that makes them suspicious or not, and that’s all a bit lurid. But for the most part, it’s telling a very difficult story the way I want it to be told, through as many perspectives as they can manage. They delivered a wallop of a scene this week; I’ll be there to see what they do next week.

WHAT'S WORTH WATCHING

WEDNESDAY, FEB. 3

Young & Hungry

Season premiere

8/7c, Freeform Gabi takes the ultimate road trip across the desert, but mixed feelings prevent her from completely enjoying the ride. Back home, Yolanda embraces the task of acting as Elliot and Alan's marriage counselor.

Supernatural 9/8c,

The CW After Sam and Dean receive word of murderous doings, Sheriff Mills reveals that Claire's been attacking everyday humans and accusing them of being monsters.

Preachers of Atlanta

Series premiere

10/9c, Oxygen The franchise heads south and follows five young pastors spreading the good word through innovative means, such as hip-hop. Well, Kanye does think he's a god....

THURSDAY, FEB. 4

American Idol 8/7c, Fox

Hollywood Week comes to a close, and that means it's time for the judges to whittle down the contestants to the top 24, one of whom will—fingers crossed!—become the next Kris Allen or Lee DeWyze.

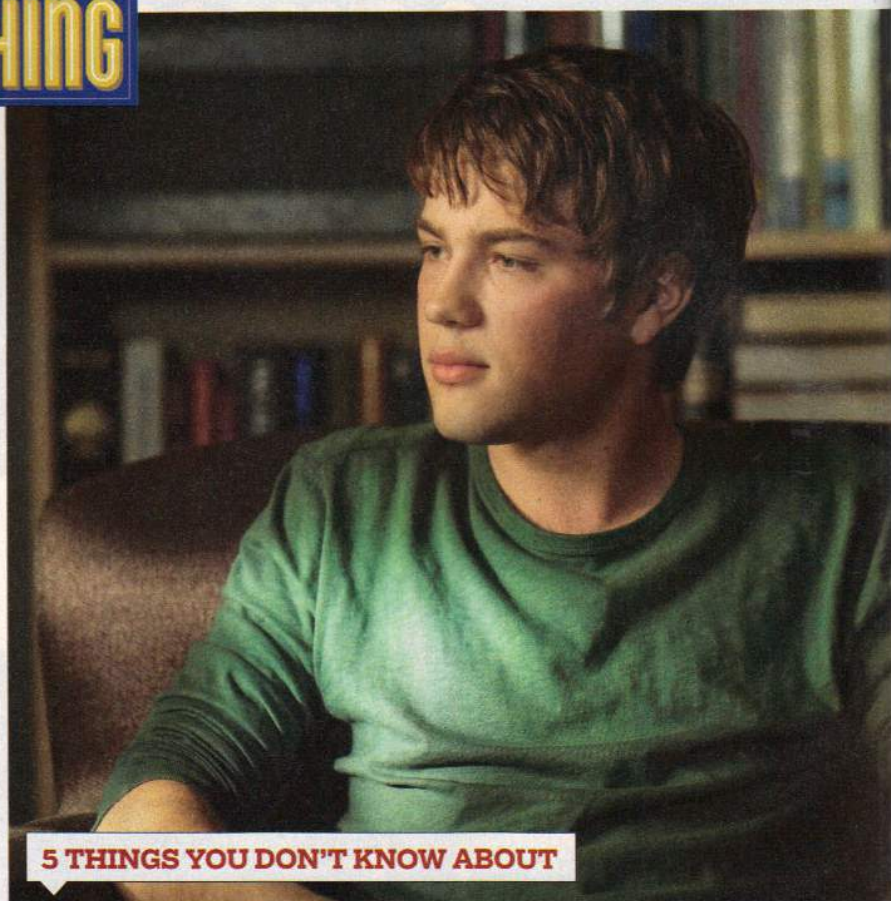
Angel From Hell

9:30/8:30c, CBS When Amy tries to get Allison to stop worrying about looking stupid, she accidentally sets off a chain of events that causes Allison to prematurely meet her soulmate.

Five Day Flip

Series premiere

11/10c, HGTV Expert renovator Charlie Barber finds outdated homes, fixes them up and flips the property in the span of five days. Meanwhile, your weekend dishes are still in the kitchen sink.



5 THINGS YOU DON'T KNOW ABOUT

CONNOR JESSUP

WEDNESDAY, FEB. 3 10/9c, ABC

MANY ASPIRE TO great things, but few achieve them by the time they reach legal drinking age. Not so with *American Crime*'s Connor Jessup. The *Falling Skies* vet—who currently plays Taylor Blaine, the quiet teen whose rape allegations against several high school basketball stars upend his sports-minded Indiana community—is also a working writer-director. Here are five more details about the accomplished 21-year-old Canadian.

—Aubry D'Arminio

1. He (sort of) made his screen debut in a Quebecois KFC commercial. He

wasn't meant to have dialogue. "I ate copious amounts of cold fries and chicken," Jessup recalls. "Then the director wanted me to say, 'Salud, Papa!' to my 'dad.' I'm the most Anglo-sounding kid ever—and when we saw it on TV, they got some French kid to dub the line!"

2. At 13, he pitched his first TV episode.

"I was looking for excuses to prove that I should be taken very seriously," he says. Jessup was starring in Discovery

Kids' *The Saddle Club* when he and cast members thought up a story good enough to shoot. "I don't even remember what it was about. It was just this crazy adventure for our characters to go on."

3. Jessup also writes, directs and produces short films. His second project, the ethereal *Boy*, about the ghost of a kid who follows his grieving classmate back home, premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival last year. "I love dramas, but I also love ghost stories," he says.

4. Making *American Crime* scares him more than any *Falling Skies* monster.

"In *Falling Skies*, you were always part of a greater scene of 10 people running down the street talking about an explosion or standing around pointing at maps," he says. "A lot of *American Crime* is two or three people sitting in a room, with complicated dialogue. It's much more difficult."

5. Despite his many efforts, he's still unsure of himself. "All actors are morbidly insecure," he says. "No matter what!"

WATCH THIS

BILL HARRIS
@billharris_tv

TRAUMA TRENDING

Canadian **Connor Jessup** plays a student at the heart of a troubling tale in *American Crime*

From the moment you see Connor Jessup's character in *American Crime*, you know something's up.

You don't know what right away. It's just something about the look on his face and his demeanor. Something has happened to this kid and he never will be the same.

"The important thing for us to try to convey in some way is that trauma is not just sadness or depression," Jessup said. "It changes your world view."

"It changes the way you look at other people, the way you look at yourself, the way you feel in a space, the way you feel in your clothes, everything that comprises someone's world view shifts after trauma."

"It's not just a surface anxiety. There's something essential about how this boy sees the world that is different now. You don't know why right away, but hopefully you get the sense that something earth-shattering has happened."

American Crime is an anthology series that returns for its second season, Wednesday, Jan. 6 on ABC. Jessup — a 21-year-old native of Toronto best known for his role as Ben Mason on the Steven Spielberg-produced science fiction series *Falling Skies* — plays a high school student named Taylor Blaine who finds himself at the centre of a major controversy.

Taylor is a quiet kid who is receiving financial aid to attend an elite private school. He doesn't really fit in, so when he surprisingly gets invited to

the basketball team's so-called "captains' party" he jumps at the chance.

Post-party, it's bad enough when humiliating pictures of a severely impaired Taylor show up online. But did something far more serious happen to Taylor? Something criminal?

Jessup was part of a high school program in Toronto called Interact, which caters to students with scheduling complications, such as actors, musicians and athletes. But he has a clear understanding of the vast differences between the community impact of high school sports in the U.S., and high school sports in Canada.

"I never was into sports at all anyway, even by a Canadian high school standard," Jessup recalled. "But the only thing that can approach it for Canadians would be hockey, because my brother played high-level hockey throughout school, and going to those games was pretty serious. But I don't think anything matches the level of going to an American high school basketball or football game. It's a cultural thing."

"The teams take on such an importance, especially at these private schools and elite schools. Sometimes you'd be

forgiven for thinking the school is just an excuse for the team, which is why, when incidents like this happen, it's even more traumatic."

Felicity Huffman plays Leslie Graham, a school administrator, and Timothy Hutton plays Dan Sullivan, the coach of the basketball team.

Both Leslie and Dan want to do the right thing, but what is the right thing? Neither of them is keen on ruining the lives of numerous young people in the absence of definitive proof that something horrible happened.

"There are no evil characters in the show," Jessup said. "Everyone is speaking from a place of trying to be helpful. It's just that they don't really know what to do."

"They sort of take that logic of, 'We don't know exactly what happened, there are a lot of questions, so let's think about protecting as many people as we can.' But in the long run, and even in the immediate run, it causes immense damage to the community, and to Taylor, my character, in particular, this logic of cover-up. It really is endemic in the system, and it's one of the

main thrusts of the season.

"I believe my character is a victim and he is in the right and this did happen and he deserves justice. But hopefully for the audience there's a whole tapestry of doubt and questioning, and not just of him and the other characters, but of your own

reflexive presumptions."

On multiple levels, *American Crime* is intense.

"Yes, you could say that," Connor Jessup said. "I think that's an appropriate word."



American Crime star and Toronto native Connor Jessup

TONIGHT'S LATE-NIGHT GUESTS

Source: interbridge.com



Fallon

The Tonight Show

■ Bill Maher
■ Brie Larson
■ The Internet



Kimmel

Jimmy Kimmel Live

■ Billy Joel
■ J.K. Simmons



Corden

The Late Late Show

■ Kurt Russell
■ Paul Dano



Meyers

Late Night

■ Retta
■ Sam Hunt



Colbert

The Late Show

■ Jerry Seinfeld



O'Brien

Conan

■ Ray Liotta

‘American Crime’ Star Connor Jessup on Similarities to ‘Making a Murderer’



“It is about how the system ... adds trauma after the fact,” ABC actor tells TheWrap

Connor Jessup plays an alleged rape victim on Season 2 of ABC’s “American Crime.”

The new season of **John Ridley**’s crime drama is certainly timely, coming on the heels of Netflix’s true-crime docu-series sensation “Making a Murderer.”

During a new episode of StudioWrap, Jessup admitted that he’s only watched one episode of “Making a Murderer,” but he can already see the similarities between the two series.

“It is about how the system, whether it’s the legal system, the school system, or the health system, adds trauma after the fact,” said the actor, who plays a high school student who is sexually assaulted by male classmates in the second season of “American Crime.”

“This kid’s already traumatized by what happened to him, and he has to go through this whole broken system that questions him and doubts him and at every turn, tries to poke holes in what he’s saying,” Jessup said of his character. “That’s what all of these victims, all these survivors, who are brave enough to say something, that’s what they have to deal with.”

The actor also described what it was like going from five seasons on the TNT sci-fi drama “Falling Skies” to a gritty crime drama.

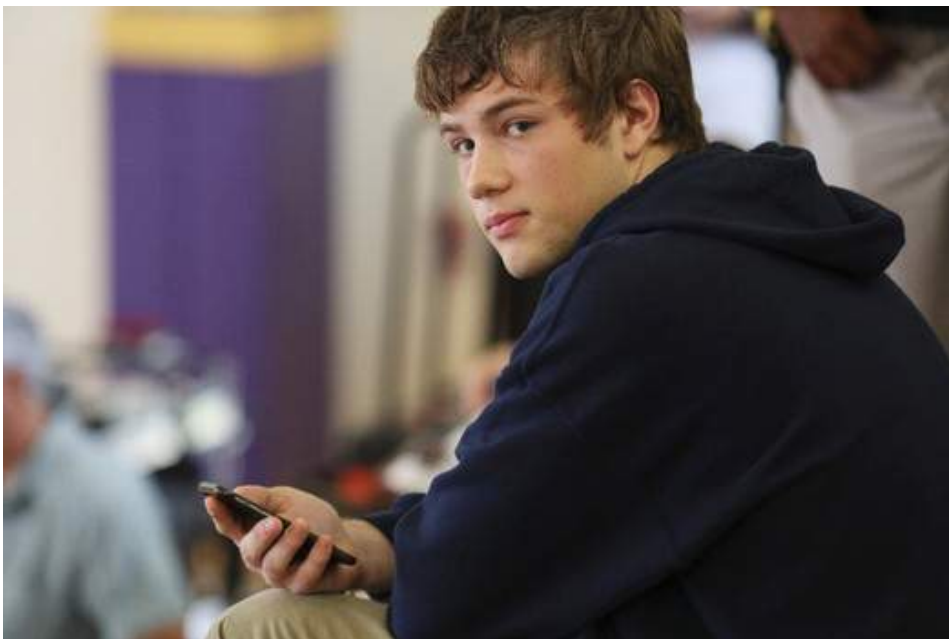
“American Crime” airs at 10 p.m. ET on ABC.



‘American Crime’ creator Ridley offers high praise for young cast

American Crime

Wednesday, 10 p.m., ABC



In this week’s episode of “American Crime,” Leyland School headmistress Leslie Graham (Felicity Huffman) works to position the institution ahead of the investigation that’s been launched following the charges of sexual assault brought by Anne Blaine (Lili Taylor). Meanwhile, Terri LaCroix (Regina King) has an intervention with her son, Kevin (Trevor Jackson), and Eric (Joey Pollari) takes a surprising detour.

One of the best things this season: the young actors who play the high-school students embroiled in the sexual-assault storyline — Pollari, Jackson, Connor Jessup, Renwick D. Scott II and Angelique Rivera. Creator John Ridley spoke to The Post about what it takes to find actors who can play believable kids.

How did you find these young actors who could handle sensitive material?

Casting director Kim Coleman found them, usually by looking in places that are not traditional. Connor, who plays Taylor Blaine, is phenomenal. He had only done one other series, “Falling Skies.” With Angelique, this is her first acting job. She was working at Disney World, playing Princess Jasmine. She came in and gave a really solid audition.

None of them conform to the types of kids you usually see on TV: the rebel, the good girl, the hellcat, the nerd.

In television, you traditionally cast really pretty people. On this show, we try to play down looks and have people look kind of real. We have people who look like people.

How did they handle themselves with the rest of the company?

It’s one thing to be a young actor who’s good. It’s another to have one who’s sitting across from Oscar winners [Timothy Hutton] and Emmy winners [Huffman and King] and not have them overreact and overreach.

VARIETY

‘American Crime’ Star Connor Jessup Discusses Season 2, ‘Staggering’ Scope of Male Sexual Assault



John Ridley’s “American Crime” returns to ABC with its second season Wednesday night, bringing in a new storyline, new characters and new stars.

“Falling Skies” alum Connor Jessup is one of the fresh faces in “Crime’s” new installment, which revolves around a high school male rape accusation, centering around Jessup’s lower-class victim Taylor who’s ridiculed by privileged student athletes at his elite prep school where he’s a complete outsider. The trouble starts right away in the premiere episode when photos of a passed-out Taylor surface, causing an uproar at the school.

Along with the return of Felicity Huffman, who plays the private school’s headmistress, and Timothy Hutton, who plays the basketball coach, Jessup takes a star-turn in the drama, holding his own among the powerful cast (his mother is played by Lily Taylor).

“The thing that appealed to me most was just John and the actors and the pedigree of the show,” Jessup tells *Variety* of his initial interest in the show, which he calls the “best experience of my career.”

Here, Jessup tells Variety about working with Ridley, dealing with tough subject matter and what’s to come in the twisty-turny case — is he truly the victim?

How did you get the part?

It was a pretty unexciting story — I auditioned for it. I self-taped for it in July and a week later, I was in L.A. testing, and a week later, I was in Austin ready to shoot. When I had auditioned for it, there was no script, it was just a few scenes. There was very little to go on. I knew that it was a story about sexual assault, I knew the dynamic of the public school and private school that becomes a driving force as the series goes on, and I knew that I was the one making these allegations. That was, more or less, all that I knew. And then as I read more and more, it became clear that this season is, I think, maybe even better than last season.

Had you watched the first season when you auditioned?

I had not. I had heard of it, and I heard nothing but good things about it. I binged it after the audition.

Even if you had watched the first season, it's a totally new show, being an anthology. Was that appealing to you?

It's a very unusual situation. I've never done something like this. To have a new character on a new story — more or less a new show — but to have that product behind you that's already proven. It's not like a pilot. It's sort of the best of both worlds. It was a really, really good thing for me. It really helps having that shape to it.

Now that you've watched season one, how does it compare to season two?

What I like is that last season before it even starts, there's a murder. When you pick up with everyone, you're kind of seeing them at the worst time of their lives from the get. This season, it's a slower burn and it takes longer to seep into the families. In the first episode, you see happy couples and moments. I think it really helps for later in the season for when the sh-t really hits the fan to have this beginning — you're seeing people before they fall apart. I think it really helps with the whole season.

And how exactly will sh-t hit the fan?

Basically, in this first episode, these allegations aren't really out there yet. They're just forming. But over the next few episodes, they become public and they pull all the characters in and it completely changes the course of these characters' lives for completely different reasons and in very different ways, but there's a rolling series of revelations and relationships, beyond what happened in this first episode. This first episode is just placing the dominos and the rest of the season is watching them fall. Right now, you don't know who I'm accusing, you don't know the specifics of the allegations, you don't really know much. Over the next few episodes, you learn all of that and clear sides start to form and it becomes a really interesting battle between different forces.

We don't really know much about your character, event after the premiere episode. Is he truly just the victim or is there more to the story?

We don't have the whole story from him yet. There are things that he's not saying, there are secrets that he has that don't get revealed until considerably later into the series. You learn more about his relationship with his mother, more about their past, his relationship with a couple members of the basketball team. There are certainly more sides to this than there seems to be at first.

Do you think people will root for Taylor?

Whether or not people will be rooting for him, I don't know. I hope so.

How did you go about your research on sexual assault?

The show was very helpful. I met with a few therapists and counselors who specialize in trauma and some specifically who specialize in male sexual assault — peer-on-peer rape. There are a couple books on the phenomenon of male sexual assault. The statistics are staggering. And then on top of that, a lot of reading. Despite the fact that it's not really an issue that is widely discussed in popular culture, there's quite a bit of academic and journalistic stuff out there, and it's really difficult and really fascinating. The scope of the issue was what immediately shocked me.

As an actor, I'm sure it's exciting to tackle such a complex issue, but besides the challenge, do you also hope to send out some sort of social message or educate viewers?

The show really is at its best when it's focusing on people. Despite being called "American Crime," the show is really not about crime. It's really about the ramifications that things have on all the people who are involved — on the victims, on the perpetrators, on the families, on the communities. So for me, and the way that John [Ridley] talks about it, we're not looking at it as representative of something larger, but just hopefully that Taylor is convincing in some way as a person who will speak to a larger thing. But anytime I start to think about that, it makes my head hurt and I get a little sweaty because trauma is different for everyone. Everyone goes through their own struggle with it. Hopefully if there's something true in the statistics of Taylor's struggle, that will speak to something larger.

"American Crime" has been credited with feeling like a cable show with all of its risk-taking on a broadcast network. Do you feel it's pushing the boundaries?

Not to say anything about the rest of network programming, but it really does feel unusual and exceptional for where it is. To get the chance to be on something that crosses into both worlds and gets the best of both, I feel like I landed on a rainbow or something. If you had said to me, "Actually this is an HBO or FX show," I would believe you. On set, you don't feel like it's a big corporation. ABC is so great, and it really is John's show.

What have you learned from working with John?

Obviously he's a brilliant writer and director and just a really great man. His stamina is just incredible. I don't know how he functions. I don't think he sleeps, I've never seen him eat. He exercises an enormous amount of very centralized control over almost every element of the show. Every part of the show feels so stylistically and thematically consistent all the way through. He knows how to work with his writers, he knows how to work with his directors, and the result is something that feels incredibly cohesive. Aside from his specific talent as a writer and director, his ability to manage something so large is amazing. I've never seen someone treat a [crew](#) as nicely as he does. One day, there were masseuses coming in for the crew.

CANADA'S RISING STARS

15 young up-and-comers from the industry's feeding group up north talk about making their mark at home and in Hollywood By Etan Vlessing



ACTOR
**CONNOR
JESSUP, 21**

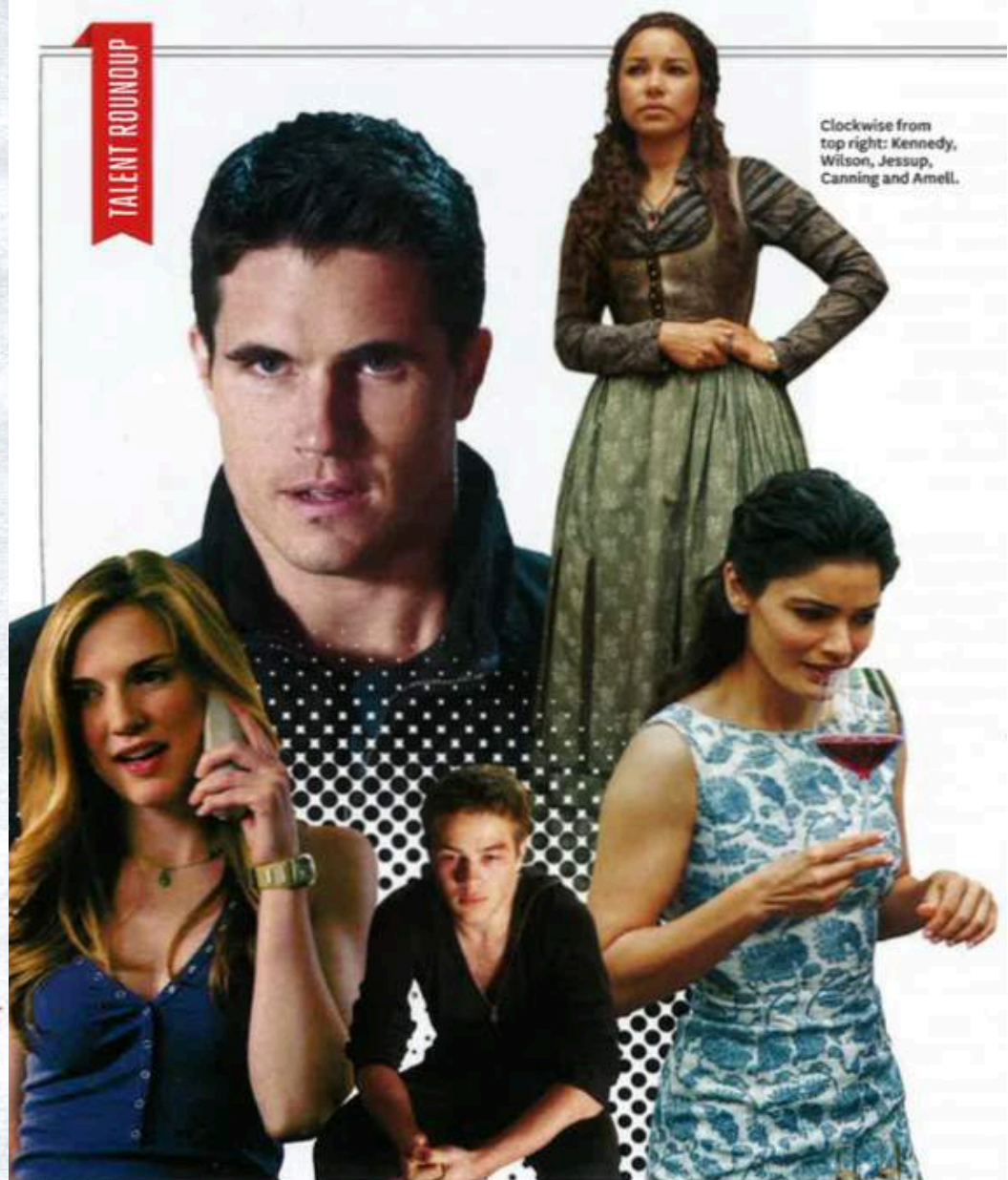
After gaining attention as Ben Mason on TNT's sci-fi series *Falling Skies* (executive produced by Steven Spielberg), Jessup will attend the Toronto Film Festival with his short film *Boy* and help launch Stephen Dunn's *Closet Monster*, in which he plays an aspiring movie makeup artist.

MENTOR My good friend Albert Shin. He made a little movie called *In Her Place* that was absolutely one of last year's best. His talent is overwhelming.

BEST ADVICE Straight out of *The Lion King*: "Be prepared."

BIGGEST 2015 ACCOMPLISHMENT Having my short film *Boy* accepted into my home festival.

CAN'T-MISS TV *Game of Thrones* is the only show I'm actually caught up on. My best friend and I binge together.



Clockwise from top right: Kennedy, Wilson, Jessup, Canning and Amell.

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PRESSREADER

WEEKEND

Your essential daily news

MOVIES MUSIC TELEVISION DIGITAL

Prepare to see more of Connor

TIFF PROFILE



CONNOR JESSUP

Local boy falls into film world from two sides

Ned Ehrbar
Metro | Toronto

Toronto native Connor Jessup has been a little busy. While his TNT television series, *Falling Skies*, wrapped up its fifth and final season earlier this summer, Jessup has been focusing on the film world — both in front of and behind the camera. He comes to TIFF this year with a double agenda: as the star of Stephen Dunn's coming-of-age drama *Closet Monster* and the director of his own short, *Boy*.

You're coming to TIFF with multiple entries to talk

about. How does that feel?

It's really exciting. I've been to TIFF with a couple movies before, and I've been coming to TIFF as an audience member since I was a little kid. I've been to other film festivals, but still the ideal image of a film festival in my head is TIFF. It's still the one that matters the most to me, and it's done wonderful things for me. TIFF's been really, really nice to me. And I'm coming back with two different movies that I care about in two different ways but both very deeply. And it's my first time as a director at the festival — and I hope not my last.

It must be nice to have it as your hometown festival, too. I don't know how much more I can say about TIFF without getting into what seems like hyperbole, but a lot of my favourite screening experi-

ences — obviously of things I've been in but also of things I haven't been in, as a viewer — were at the festival. Just the atmosphere and the tone that overtakes the city in those two weeks is unique and extremely invigorating.

How did the experience of shooting *Boy* differ from your last short?

Pretty radically, for a lot of reasons. This one was more fun. Working with kids was awesome. I started as a child actor, and I sort of think I have a little understanding of what that's like — what it's like to be a kid and be on a set. So it was fun for me. I can't speak for the kids, but it was fun for me. We had a great crew this time, and that's nice. I'm proud of how the movie looks, the work that everyone did.

What was your attraction to

Closet Monster as a project?

I think I was in Hong Kong or something, and this script got sent to me. When you get sent something, 95 per cent of the time it's for an audition, and then that rare golden five per cent or less of the time it's an offer. And this was neither. There was no context given. It was just a script by this first-time, untested director, Stephen Dunn. To be brutally honest I totally forgot about it. I'm terrible on email. So they were waiting on pins and needles for two weeks while I, like an a--hole, trapezed around somewhere else. But I finally read it, obviously. In a way it's a very simple story and a very old story — the coming of age tale, a kid in a small town, difficulty with his family. But within that shell

were these wonderful bursts of humour and imagination and really deep-felt emotion.

Considering your age and that you're acting and directing, do you worry about types of "English language Xavier Dolan" comparisons?

You know, it's interesting, when we were making *Closet Monster* in the aftermath of that, people were talking about Stephen — even people who were trying to promote the movie internally — and using language like that. There's something that catches the popular imagination about this image of a boy wonder or a prodigy. I

think very, very few people fit that definition. Obviously what Xavier's done is extremely impressive. He probably does fit that definition, but I think very few other people do. I certainly don't. I have the advantage that I just happened to get started young. But I think it's a little too much pressure to put on people, you know? It's a hard question to answer. I'm not too worried, I'll say that. If anyone wants to go around and say that, I'm not going to stop them but I am going to raise an eyebrow and think they're a little nuts.

Well, you've got the humility aspect going for you, so there's that.

Um ... thank you. (laughs) And trust me, I'm not. I have enough of a tendency toward narcissism that it doesn't have to be flamed, as my mother would be happy to tell you.

Connor Jessup
GETTY IMAGES

TRUE STORY

'There's a lot of power in truth,' says Freehold director

Ned Ehrbar
Metro | HollywoodJulianne Moore and Ellen Page in *Freehold*. CONTRIBUTED

Screenwriter Ron Nyswaner (*Philadelphia*) has been watching closely as the push for marriage equality ramped up over the last five years, culminating in June's U.S. Supreme Court victory. He was interested because he'd been working on a feature adaptation of the documentary short *Freehold*, chronicling the

fight of cancer-stricken New Jersey detective Laurel Hester to have her pension awarded to her domestic partner. That film debuts at TIFF with Julianne Moore starring as Hester, and Nyswaner thinks now is a great time to stop and reflect on this turning point in the fight for gay marriage.

I'd imagine it's dizzying how much has changed in terms of marriage equality in Amer-

ica even since writing this. I never thought I'd see in my lifetime that gay marriage would be the law of the land. I even think five years ago I thought it was maybe possible, but didn't think it would happen as quickly as it did. I think we were a little ahead of the curve, and I'm happy about that.

In that context, how is it to view this story? Suddenly it's

very much a period piece.

Now we can look at their story as this significant moment in history, when they were just at the moment before the tide turned. And because of their struggle and courage, they were at the forefront.

As a screenwriter, what's the weight of responsibility when you're telling a story about real people's lives?

I think it has a great deal of

influence for me; I do a lot of research-based writing. In this case, we're using real people's names, we're writing and making a movie about a recent piece of history, and I felt honour-bound to be as truthful as possible. Yet, we also have a responsibility as filmmakers to our audience. ... I actually believe truth is often more powerful than my imagination. (laughs) There's a lot of power in truth.



TIFF: Breakout Star Connor Jessup on 'American Crime' and Teen Sexuality

In *Closet Monster*, the feature directorial debut from director Stephen Dunn, Connor Jessup plays a teenager struggling with his sexual identity and reeling from childhood traumas of an alcoholic, abusive father and an absentee mother. In this timely story, which premiered Sunday at Toronto International Film Festival, Jessup manages a vulnerable performance that has the marks of an actor much older than 21 years old.

Equally as impressive is his passion for filmmaking -- the process, the history, the technicality. His second short film, *Boy*, which he wrote, directed and produced, and managed to shoot on Kodak film, also premiered here at TIFF.

The Canadian actor, who appeared in the post-apocalyptic TNT drama *Falling Skies*, will add to the buzz generated at TIFF with a role on ABC's *American Crime* when the Emmy-nominated series returns in the spring.

ETonline sat down with Jessup to discuss his teenage struggles with identity, filmmaking and *Buffy*, the talking hamster.



ETonline: Let's start somewhere important: *Buffy* the hamster.

Connor Jessup: It's a testament to the strength of the script that a movie with a talking hamster is actually good... because it sounds scary. The idea is that it represents a part of his psychology and it fits into the tone of the film, which has these little bursts of imagination. Weirdly, the talking hamster, I don't think it feels out of place. It didn't feel out of place in the script.

The weird thing is, in the script the voice is described as like "robotic," sort of Siri-like. Then they made the decision to use Isabella Rossellini for the voiceover. It was this entirely new element of warmth and humor, a gentle comfort to the character that wasn't there in the script, just because that's who Isabella is. I think it works well. I'd had this really elaborate idea that they should set up a mirror in front of me so that I could have eye-line with myself and could talk to myself. On a Freudian level, that made sense to me, that this is a conversation I'm having with myself. Of course, on the day of shooting, time and circumstances didn't allow for it.

Have you had much experience in your own life with closeted teens?

No direct experiences in the sense of stories I could tell. Stephen and I talked about it a lot during and before shooting the film, which is that we never really thought about it so much as a coming out story. We always saw Oscar's sexuality as a part of him. The struggle with his identity is partly the struggle to come to terms with his sexuality, but there are a lot of other parts of his identity as well. To me, that is one thing I like about the movie, that it shows how *everyone* struggles with identity at that age, no matter your sexuality. Everyone struggles with their family, their community, with where they are, who they are, who they want to be. If you can't relate to that on a fundamental level, then I don't know who you are.

You're still early on in your career, but you've had some meaty roles. How do you go about picking them?

It's only in the last year that I've had the ability to be even minutely selective, and even then it's within such a narrow capacity. To be honest, I've just been really lucky. The things I've happened to get and the people I've happened to work with have been really great experiences. It wasn't like I looked through 10 scripts and picked *Closet Monster* out of them -- I wish that had been the case and I like to think that I would have picked it if it had been -- but I guess I was in the right place at the right time. I think that if you work with good people, then you meet a lot of other good people, and hopefully, it has a certain amount of momentum to it.

So you're young, you're handsome and a talented actor -- that's obvious. What people don't realize is that you're a filmmaker as well, a writer, director and producer.

Really the only thing I know anything about in the world, because I certainly am socially awkward and I'm definitely a mess in almost every other aspect of my life, but movies -- I know something about those, and they're what I really love. Anything I can do to make them, I will. Acting is a very different thing. Acting, you're a part of a movie, and hopefully, with someone like Stephen, you're part of a vision you genuinely believe in, but that's rare. You're an instrument, and that can be a lot of fun, but sometimes it's fun to be on the other side of the instrument.

Speaking of being a part of something, you're a part of the next season of *American Crime*. How does it feel to be a spoke in that wheel?

It feels really good. That's one I'm really excited about. I'd been having this weird dichotomy in my head where I was like, "I'm going to do big bad things or little good things." I didn't think I was going to end up being able to do a big good thing so soon, so it's really exciting. The show is a John Ridley show, who wrote *12 Years a Slave*, and despite it being a big network show, the amount of centralization and control that he has is incredible. Every detail goes through him. In that sense, it feels like a very long-term entity. It's really a single person's vision, so that's incredibly exciting to be a part of.

What is your role like as Taylor Blaine?

The season takes place in Indianapolis and revolves around an elite prep school and a sexual assault that happens at one of the school's parties. It deals with the ripples that these accusations create in the community and the victims. The first season explored race and faith, this season is focusing on class, sexual identity, issues of consent. It's very dramatic. I play the victim, the person who goes to one of these parties and accuses a few players from the basketball team of assaulting me.

Quite a serious subject. And close to what you deal with in *Closet Monster*, yes?

Tonally different, dramatically somewhat similar. With *Closet Monster*, despite having the furnishings of a coming of age story and the structure within that, that Stephen's sensibility within that body was this great beating heart of real imagination, excitement and enthusiasm.

American Crime returns for a second season in 2016.

DEADLINE

Connor Jessup, Angelique Rivera Join 'American Crime' Season 2 Lineup



American Crime has added two more cast members for the second season of ABC's drama anthology. *Falling Skies* alum Connor Jessup has signed a one-year deal and has been cast in the role of "Connor Blaine", a young man at the center of accusations that roil two high schools along socio-economic lines. Meanwhile, newcomer Angelique Rivera has been cast in the role of "Evy". The only witness to a crime, her testimony could alter the lives of the young men who stand accused.

Jessup and Rivera join returning stars Lili Taylor, Felicity Huffman, Timothy Hutton, Elvis Nolasco and Richard Cabral, all of whom are playing new characters in a new setting, along with just-announced new castmember Joey Pollari. Executive producer John Ridley has stated that the new season will deal with "physicality, sexuality and societal boundaries with the same urgency as our first season dealt with race and faith."

Jessup currently stars in the 5th and final season of the TNT's *Falling Skies*, and recently appeared in the independent film *Blackbird*, which premiered at TIFF; Jessup received a "Rising Star" accolade from the festival. He can next be seen opposite Isabella Rossellini in Stephen Dunn's *Closet Monster*. He's represented by CESD, Anonymous Content, and Schreck Rose Dapello & Adams.

FIVE SEASONS OF *FALLING SKIES* HAVE HAD A MAJOR IMPACT ON CONNOR JESSUP AND HIS CHARACTER, BEN MASON.

FALLING SKIES/Connor Jessup

As an actor, you never know what your next role is going to be or where that character's story arc will take you. Connor Jessup never expected to spend the past five years struggling to stay alive and battling to reclaim the Earth from an alien race called the Espheni in TNT's sci-fi drama *Falling Skies*. His character, Ben Mason, the middle child of former Boston University professor Tom Mason, stood alongside his father as well as his two brothers against these extraterrestrial invaders. Ben not only saw firsthand but also experienced unimaginable horrors, none of which he will ever forget. Everything comes to a head in the show's current fifth and final season, and, not surprisingly, Ben emerges not quite yet a man, but no longer a carefree teen.

"All of Tom Mason's [Noah Wyle] children's stories were in very different ways coming of age stories over the course of *Falling Skies*' five seasons," notes Jessup. "Hal [Drew Roy] was in his late teens when all this began and he ended up becoming both a man and a leader, while Ben's younger brother Matt [Maxim Knight] started out as a kid and sort of went through the throes of early adolescence. As for Ben, he went from being kind of a passive civilian to this angst-like, aggressive warrior, and by the end of the series he has reached a nice level of maturity. Ben is a good person. He's very gentle and considerate, despite all the crap he went through, and comes out the other side of this ordeal, not unscathed, but okay, and I'm very pleased about that."

"This season there is a resolution, or a build toward a resolution, of the conflict of last season, which was the triangle between Maggie [Sarah Carter], Hal, and Ben. Hopefully it doesn't stray into melodrama at any point in the story, but it does allow my character to ask a number of questions about how he feels about his own predicament regarding the spikes [part of an alien implant used to control human children]. That has been a big part of Ben's story arc throughout the past five seasons and how he's dealing with being different and 'blessed' with the curse of having special abilities. I'd say that continues to be the main thrust of Ben's storyline and is something not resolved but more or less addressed in Season 5, especially when it comes to, again, his feelings and Maggie's feelings about it. Their differing views about this issue impact the character dynamic between the two of them."

Jessup had more than one opportunity to say goodbye to *Falling Skies* and his character during the show's final two days of filming. "It was sort of weird the way that we finished shooting," says the actor. "The second



to last day of filming was this massive group scene where almost every character was there. When the director said, 'Cut,' it really felt like the show had wrapped and everyone began hugging and saying goodbye to one another. Then, however, there was an additional day of shooting with just me and Noah Wyle. I don't want to spoil anything, but it's a really important scene in the finale, so we were still very much working and continuing to flesh out our characters."

"So the second to last day we had our big, celebratory, weepy farewell, and then on the last day it was more serious, focused, and quieter. That was, to me, an interesting spilt, because it kind of represented our whole experience of doing the show, which was the balance between the more familial, joyous and grand moments and then the quieter, more serious, contained moments. That's how we ended things, or at least how Noah and I ended things, which I thought was quite fitting."

Five years of working on *Falling Skies* brings with it many happy memories for the actor, and they all have one thing in common. "All my fondest memories of the show are connected with the friends I worked with," says Jessup. "Every season when I returned to work, it felt like I was returning to summer camp and I got to spend the next six months with these amazing people. There are so many rich as well as important moments from all those years, and they all have

to do with these people who I love so much. That's what I'll miss the most about *Falling Skies*. It's not like I'll never see or talk to them again, but we all live in different places and go off to work on other things, so it won't be the same."

"Now that I'm able to look back on the show as a whole entity, I can't stress enough just how massive an impact—personal, professional, emotional, and developmental—this has had on me. I barely remember the person I was going into *Falling Skies*. I was on the show from the ages of 15 to 20, which is a big span of time in a person's life. Everyone changes a lot during that time, but when you work in this type of industry, I think those changes seem a little more obvious."

ASH VS EVIL DEAD

What would happen if you mixed together a group of college kids on spring break, an isolated cabin in the woods, and a copy of *Naturon Demonto* (aka *Book of the Dead*)? It sounds like a recipe for disaster, not to mention a high mortality rate, right? Oddly enough, this potentially lethal-sounding combo was the makings of the 1981 cult classic horror feature film *The Evil Dead*, which resulted in two sequels, a 2013 reboot/remake (*Evil Dead*), a video game, a series of comic books, and even a stage musical.

Earlier this year, the original film's leading man, Bruce Campbell, along with its writer/director Sam

CONNOR JESSUP

Juggling 'Skies' and indie filmmaking

Most young actors might have used their first series paychecks on a luxury splurge, but Connor Jessup spent his "Saddle Club" bucks to produce an indie film: "Amy George" played at last year's Toronto Intl. Film Festival. This year, Jessup was named a Rising Star by the fest and stars in "Blackbird," which premiered at TIFF, as a teen accused of plotting a Columbine-like spree.

In addition to a flourishing indie film career, Jessup gained widespread exposure as the alien-abducted teen Ben in TNT's sophomore series "Falling Skies" from Steven Spielberg. Though not featured prominently in the first season, Jessup jumped into action hero mode this year as the conduit between the humans and extraterrestrials.

Impact: Jessup's alien-abducted role expanded greatly in the second season of "Falling Skies."

Next: Filming just began on season three of TNT's alien skein

Causes: Free the Children, working to end child labor and poverty

Both "Amy" and "Falling" proved major breakthroughs for the Toronto native: "'Falling' opened doors for me in the U.S., where it is hard for Canadian actors to break in, and raised my meter in L.A., where I never had one before," Jessup says. "'Amy' broke through a different kind of

barrier, that made me understand I wanted to make movies. 'Falling' had the bigger impact, but 'Amy' was a milestone in understanding where I wanted to go in my career."

Jessup also wrote, produced and directed the shorts "Something" and "I Don't Hurt Anymore!" in addition to writing and directing the play "Pushing Normal," for which he won an Award of Distinction at the 2010 Sears Drama Festival.

"My goal since 'Amy George' is to direct my first feature before I'm 24 or 25, so I'm racing against Orson Welles," Jessup says.

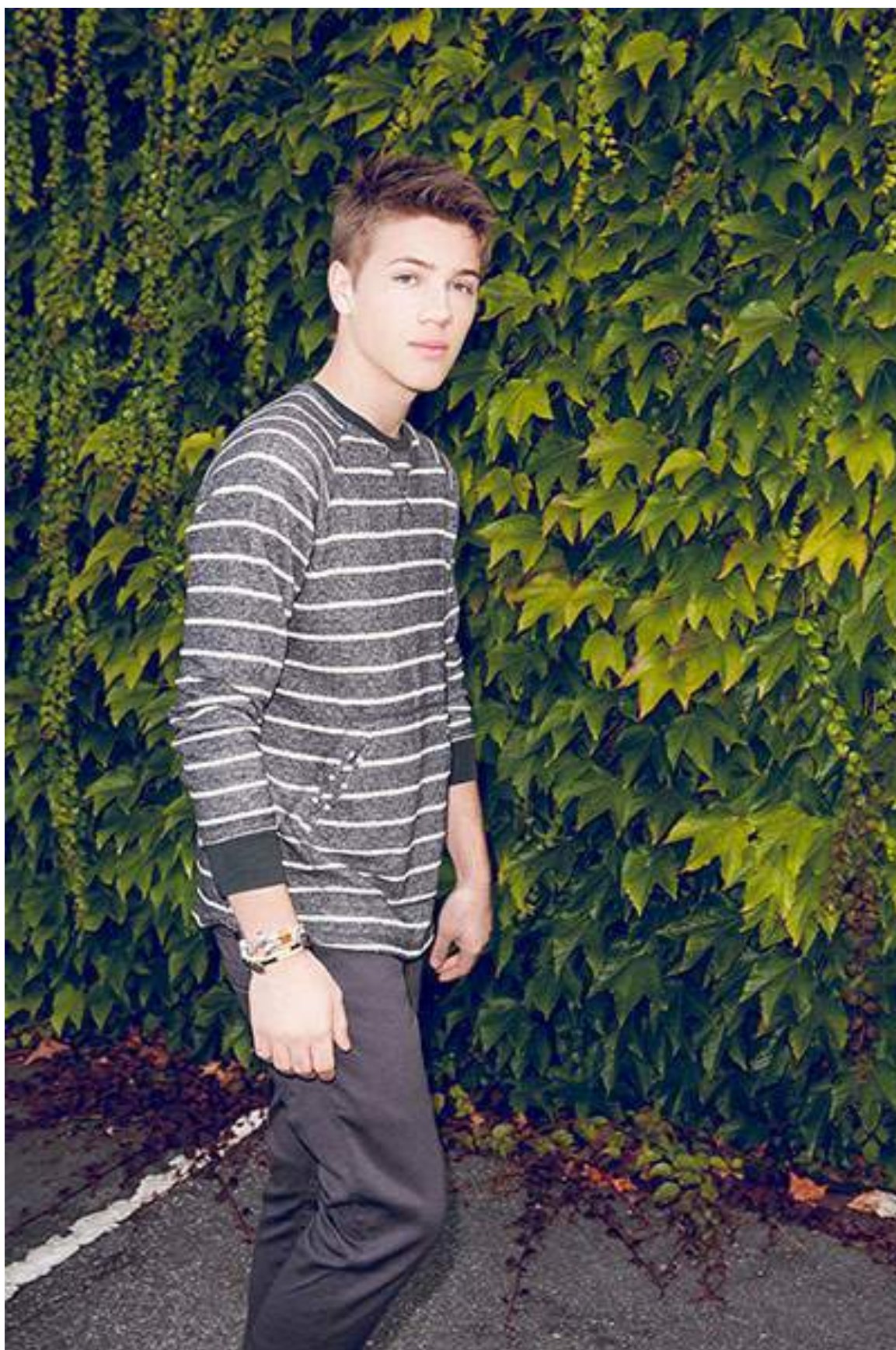
—Susan Young



Peter Bragg/Getty Images

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RIISING STAR IN FALLING SKIES

Connor Jessup, 18, is the leading man on Steven Spielberg's *Falling Skies*, TNT's flagship drama.

words by Lisa Schwarzbaum • photographs by Adam Osato • styling by Deborah Pakowski of L'Oréal agency
makeup and grooming by Regan Hochstetler of L'Oréal agency

From his love for acting in films to writing, producing and directing his own content, Connor Jessup is a young talent from Canada working his way up the ranks of the film industry. After achieving a leading role in the kids' television series *The Saddle Club* at the age of 11, Jessup landed a part in the American TV drama *Falling Skies*—produced by none other than Steven Spielberg.

FAULT managed to catch up with Jessup while he was in Vancouver shooting the third season of *Falling Skies*. The dedicated 18-year-old has already established a considerable reputation as an actor and, having already produced the independent film *Amy George*, it seems that Connor's principal ambition now is to divert his creative flair and originality increasingly into writing and directing his own material.

FAULT: How did you start acting?

CONNOR: I started acting when I was 11. I've always been a dramatic child. For a couple of years I just did auditions, commercials and guest parts, then I got a role on a kids' TV show called *The Saddle Club* when I was 13. That was the turning point for me ... when it went from being semi-professional to being more serious, and my thinking became more long-term.

You play the character Ben Mason in *Falling Skies*, which is produced by Steven Spielberg. What's it like working with someone with such a huge reputation and who is that influential?

Even after three years, it's still odd and so surreal to me that I'm involved in something that he's involved in. I grew up watching his movies—everyone did. He's a huge inspiration to everyone, and it's amazing to work on a project where you hear his notes on scripts, and you know he's watching you. You can feel him very heavily during production. There's a great sense of relief from everyone, 'cause you know you're in good hands.

You did some writing and producing for a film called *I Don't Hurt Anymore*.

Yes, there's been a few things. I produced a movie called *Amy George* that played at the Toronto International Film Festival. My main driving force for being in this business is [that] I love movies, and after a couple years of watching movies and acting, it didn't take me long to realise that I wanted to do more, that being behind the camera was very intriguing to me. So I have tried to do as much as I can in the time that I've had.

Would you say writing and directing is something that you would want to do in the future?

Writing and directing has great appeal. When you're writing and directing, you follow a project from its very conception to its release. You're with it the entire time, so it feels more like a full thing, whereas with acting, you come in when the pre-production is almost done. You're only involved in one stage of the movie, not all three. It's easier to be in

more projects, and you get to diversify more. There's something fun and really gratifying to go down long-term on a writer/director path. So, yes, I definitely want to continue to explore that in the future.

What inspired you to write your own storyline for a film?

Amy George is a movie I produced. It was an opportunity [that] kind of fell onto me. It was really my first experience behind the camera. In the 20 days it took to film that movie, I realised that's what I loved doing. So that kind of set me on a path. It made me want to write my own shorts, my own features and do my own stuff. So I think I'll always have *Amy George* to thank for getting me on the path that I hope to continue following.

Do you have your own sense of style, acting-wise?

It's hard to find exactly what your style is. All actors and filmmakers do have their own sense of style, their own technique, their own preference [and] their own way of working. It's a comprehensive world. Acting-wise, there are people who tend to get consumed by the world. I'm less like that. I'm more about description, analysis and breakdown. It's more of an intellectual process for me than an emotional one. It's hard to say which one's better. Taste-wise, I've always been into a mixture. For example, there was an indie movie last year called *Another Earth* which would perfectly fit into the movies that I like; it had a sort of weird sci-fi element to it. But, at its core, it was a drama and a human story—and a well-told one.

In the future, do you have a certain type of film or programme you would really like to write or direct?

I don't know—it's hard to decide. I have trouble putting movies into types and genres. Most of the stuff I like doesn't fit into a specific type of genre. I like movies like ... *Drive*. I'd really like to do a movie like that, or like *Machinima*. It's a little bit odd, and there's [a] surreal element to it, but it is a character study at its core. Those are the kind of movies that are most appealing to me and the kind of thing I would like to do.

THE Hollywood REPORTER

'Falling Skies' Actor Connor Jessup on Season Finale: 'It's a Nice Midpoint' for Ben's Story

2

"In the finale, you finally figure out which side he's fallen on"

As *Falling Skies* wraps up its rollercoaster sophomore season, actor **Connor Jessup** -- who plays the alien-human hybrid Ben -- looked back on a year he called "crazy."

After a season playing a zombieified version of his character, Jessup expressed excitement over the producers evolving Ben into a gun-wielding fighter.

"They made Ben an action hero. They threw him in the front line. It was crazy. It was much more physical season for me this year. It feels like a totally different role, a totally different part from season one," he told *The Hollywood Reporter* when he dropped by the *THR* Cover Lounge.



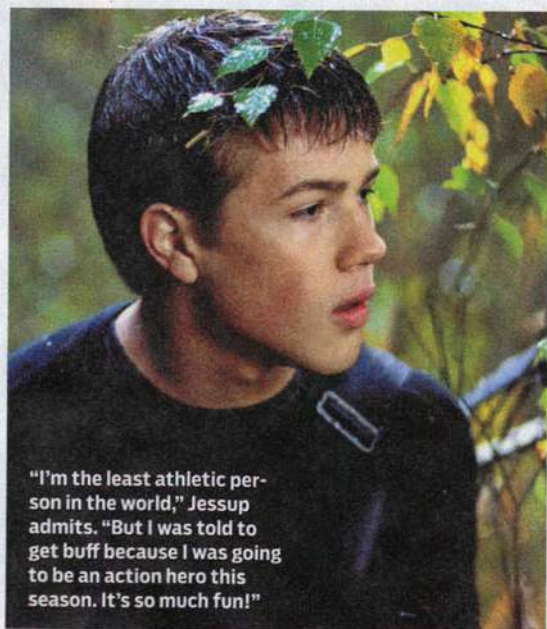
Jessup discussed the season-long struggle that his alter-ego has been going through, with the Skitters and the 2nd Mass.

"All season long, Ben's been walking a tightrope between alien and human. The conflict with this character has been which way is he going to fall and there has been forces pulling him in different directions," he said. "In the finale, you finally figure out which side he's fallen on. The angst and conflict that has driven him has taken another large step. It's a nice midpoint in Ben's storyline."

Jessup spoke of Ben's connection to the Skitters and the decision to leave 2nd Mass for the Rebellion, saying, "It's kind of the tentative silver lining in a very, very dark storm cloud and he's very excited about that possibility -- and that's why he's so enthusiastic, so blindly trusting in this Red-Eyed figure."

When Sunday's finale rolls around, the Canadian actor -- who was named a Rising Star from the Toronto International Film Festival and has an indie film *Blackbird* screening this year -- teased that Ben's decision will be revealed to be a good, or potentially bad, thing.

"It's always been a conflict between he and his dad [Tom]. Why do you believe this? Why are you so sure? Even Ben can't say. It's not like he has any irrefutable proof that no one else does. In many ways, he's taking it on faith," Jessup said. "By the end of the season, you will find out whether that decision to throw himself into that will have really positive consequences or really disastrous consequences."



"I'm the least athletic person in the world," Jessup admits. "But I was told to get buff because I was going to be an action hero this season. It's so much fun!"

FALLING SKIES

Sunday, 9/8c, TNT
tntdrama.com
Twitter:
@FallingSkiesTNT

The Not-so-friendly Skies

Like Ben Mason, the human/alien hybrid he plays on the sci-fi hit *Falling Skies*, Connor Jessup has a dual personality. The Canadian actor, who turns 18 on June 23, has been on TV since he was a tween, but he's also been an exec producer on the indie teen flick "Amy George" and a writer and director of several short films. "Right now I want to do it all," says the confident teen with a laugh.

Laughs aren't in the picture anytime soon for Ben, the angsty adolescent whose time with the Skitters, the show's alien invaders, has left him with superhuman strength and mysterious glowing spikes in his back. His ordeal has fueled a "consuming rage" to kill Skitters, which leads to life-changing consequences in Sunday's emotional episode. Ben and his only friend, Jimmy (Dylan Authors), defy orders and go out gunning for the creatures. "It's probably not the smartest thing to do," Jessup says. As the hunters become the hunted, Ben has his first face-to-mandible encounter with a Skitter later known as Red Eye. "What will complicate Ben's feelings," the actor teases, "is it seems not all Skitters are the same. The situation is not as black-and-white as we thought."

Which could provide a small glimmer of hope for Ben. "He's looking for any positive spin he can find that will show that what's happening to him isn't all bad." There's another hopeful moment for the entire 2nd Mass when a self-proclaimed emissary from a new government in Charleston, South Carolina, arrives and encourages the group to join them. "That becomes the goal for the rest of the season," Jessup reveals.

Meanwhile, Ben faces yet another tragedy. "At this point, we don't know if this will help him reconsider his violence or push him further down," the actor muses. "There are a lot of complex issues ahead." —Ileane Rudolph

→ SUMMER'S ACTION SPECTACULAR

FALLING SKIES
JUNE 17 TNT

We may not want to live in the dark and dangerous post-apocalyptic world depicted on Steven Spielberg's ambitious alien-invasion drama, but we love escaping

to it on a weekly basis. From an extraterrestrial presence with mysterious motives to a group of colorful human combatants determined to take a stand, the

sci-fi series smartly balances intricate *Lost*-like mythology with thrilling scenes of warfare. "I think there's something about our show that taps into the sense that we can overcome adversity if we bond together to fight and accomplish something. And I think that's appealing," says new showrunner Remi Aubuchon, who teases that the action will reach new levels of badassery in season 2. "The characters have become more proactive, they're taking the fight to

the aliens." Even the show's resident doc, the unflappable Anne Glass (Moon Bloodgood), will get to trade in her scalpel for a little firepower. "There's some action that I get to take on," says Bloodgood, who also hints at a burgeoning romance with leading resistance fighter Tom Mason (Noah Wyle) after he returns from his spaceship excursion. "I loved it." We're guessing the aliens on the receiving end of said action weren't quite as thrilled. —Nuzhat Naoreen



...
Noah Wyle, Connor Jessup, and Moon Bloodgood on *Falling Skies*



SUN Television

Listings for June 16-22, 2013

New forces plague Canadian
Connor Jessup on the Steven
Spileberg-produced sci-fi series

Skies the limit

TIFF's RISING STARS

The development of emerging talent in the Canadian film industry is a high priority for the Toronto International Film Festival. For the second year, TIFF Rising Stars programme has chosen four participants to take part in a series of public events and industry meetings. This is an opportunity for these four rising stars to receive intensive professional development from international casting directors, filmmakers, producers and executives.



The TIFF Rising Stars are:

Tatiana Maslany is a Regina born actor who has garnered an impressive resume. Her role in *Grown Up Movie Star* earned her the World Dramatic Special Jury Prize at Sundance 2010 and a Genie Award Nomination. She will also be appearing in *Picture Day*, which will debut at the 2012 Toronto International Film Festival.

Charlie Carrick is a British Canadian actor from Newcastle, England. In 2011 he was a resident at the Canadian Film Centre's Actors Conservatory and he will next be seen in a recurring guest arc on Showtime's *The Borgias*.

Connor Jessup received critical acclaim for his performance as Ben

Mason in Steven Spielberg's *Falling Skies*. He has previously appeared at TIFF, he was executive producer for the movie *Amy George*, which played at the 2011 festival.

Charlotte Sullivan is a Genie award-nominated actress who was born and raised in Toronto, Ontario. Her most notable role was playing Marilyn Monroe in the controversial Emmy Award-winning series *The Kennedys*. She is currently playing police officer Gail Peck in the hit series *Rookie Blue*.

A teenage rising star

At 17, Connor Jessup has already had plenty of experience on both sides of the camera, **KAREN HARDY** writes

Connor Jessup isn't your typical 17-year-old Hollywood actor. For a start it's impossible to find out any juicy gossip about him. Does he party hard, does he have a girlfriend, is there a sordid story? But the internet's not talking.

Luckily Jessup is taking a break from shooting the hit series *Falling Skies* to answer some questions from *The Canberra Times*.

"Unfortunately, or maybe fortunately, there really isn't that much to tell," he says.

"It's probably a good thing. If your life story reads like an episode of *The Young and the Restless* it's probably not a good thing."

Social networking sites reveal a little more. He's an avid tweeter too, with more than 1400 followers.

"It's a great way to interact with people you might not otherwise see or talk to," he says.

"Since the show has been released, I've had lots of people tweeting me about how much they love the it, which is really nice to hear, but also a bit overwhelming. Twitter is a very humbling thing."

Jessup himself comes across quite humble, quite grounded. He's always had an interest in drama, theatre and film and started acting professionally when he was 11.

"I had a few friends who had agents and were auditioning for commercials, and I thought it sounded like fun," he says.

"I convinced my mum to help me find an agent and she grudgingly agreed."

"I really do love acting. It's one of the few jobs where adults can dress up and play like I did when I was a little kid. I think that to be an actor you have to be a child at heart, which is really appealing to me."

"I definitely see myself acting for a long time, although I am eager to work behind the camera as well."

Jessup has already made progress on a career behind the camera. He recently wrote, produced, directed and edited the shorts *Something* and *I Don't Hurt Anymore!* and wrote and directed the play *Pushing Normal* for which he won an Award of Distinction for the script at the 2010 Sears Drama Festival. He is also the executive producer of the independent film *Amy George*, which premiered at the Wisconsin International Film Festival in April.

"I love writing, directing and producing," he says.

"Being involved in a project from inception to completion is an amazing thing."

"I do think it is becoming more important to be versatile in this business. If you know a little bit about directing it informs your acting, and vice versa. Also, for a lot of people in the industry, work is hard to come by. Being proficient at many different occupations allows you to have more opportunities, and also allows you to take control of your own career."

"For example, I know that Xavier Dolan, a Canadian writer/director/actor, wrote his first film, which he also starred in, partly because he wasn't getting any good parts as an actor. So he wrote himself one. People like that are becoming more common; it is commendable."

Jessup says having a knowledge of directing, cinematography and the like is invaluable when acting.

"If you understand the motivations and intentions behind a certain camera movement, or a certain type of lighting, then your performance instantly becomes in sync with the style of the film."

Jessup worked with Academy Award-winning director Steven Spielberg on *Falling Skies* (Spielberg was joint creator and producer) and that was an a great learning opportunity.

"Spielberg was very involved in the casting process, the concept design process and even laid out the visual

style of the show. There was never a day of shooting when it didn't feel like you were working on a Steven Spielberg production, which is a great morale booster for everyone involved."

Jessup also relished the opportunity to work with Noah Wyle, best known here in Australia for his role as John Carter on *ER*.

"Noah was amazing, I really can't sing his praises highly enough," Jessup says.

"He's an incredibly talented actor, and also a very generous actor. He really cares more about the production as a whole than simply his own performance; he is a true team player. He is also an kind and intelligent man, acting aside. I learnt a lot from working with Noah."

Falling Skies is a science fiction drama, taking place on Earth six months after its been invaded by aliens. Eighty per cent of the population, all governments, military and a vast amount of infrastructure have been wiped out. The show follows a group of survivors who are part of a resistance group, and follows their efforts to both survive and fight back.

Jessup plays Ben Mason, the son of resistance leader Tom Mason, played by Noah Wyle, and part of the story centres around the father's search for his son.

For some reason the aliens kidnap all the remaining teenagers, fitting them with a harness to control them.

"That is one of the most interesting parts of the series in my opinion," says Jessup. "And I know that it was Spielberg himself who came up with it. The mystery is not fully revealed at the end of season one, so I'm still in the dark about the ultimate reason."

"I have my theories like anyone else though. I've heard a few people speculate that it is because teenagers minds are not fully formed, so they are more susceptible to the harnesses, and things along those lines."

Jessup thinks the alien invasion sub-genre of science fiction is particularly captivating because it attempts to delve into that big unknown.

"The huge question mark that exists in the universe: are we alone? There is something incredibly interesting about that question because, depending on the answer, it could have tremendous consequences on how we live our lives."

"I think people like fiction that makes them think about that."

Are we alone?

"I do believe that there are other life forms in the universe. The way I look at it, there are too many stars in too many galaxies for other life not to exist. I don't know what form that life would take, or if it would be intelligent or not, but I do think that we are not alone."

"However, I think that the chances of us encountering this alien life at any point in the future is rather minimal. The universe is too vast. If we were to be invaded though, I have a hard time imagining that humans could survive for long."

"If another species had the technologies necessary for intergalactic travel, they'd have to be unimaginably more advanced technologically than us. I don't think we'd stand a chance. Who knows though? Humans have proved to be quite resilient in the past."

Resilience is a word this up-and-coming actor knows all about.

■ *Falling Skies* screens on Fox 8 at 8.30pm on Thursdays.



Connor Jessup is psyched to be in the war of the worlds on TNT's 'Falling Skies'

Just out of high school, young star has already made short films and was executive producer on a Toronto festival entry

Being "harnessed" and possibly having his mind compromised by malevolent aliens won't derail Connor Jessup's plans.

On TNT's "Falling Skies," the man-vs.-alien drama that wraps up its second season at 9 p.m. Sunday, Jessup plays Ben Mason, one of the three sons of resistance leader Tom Mason (Noah Wyle).

Ben was captured by the aliens and put in a "harness," a mind control device that clamps to the spine. He returned, but then left again, making it unclear whether he's under alien influence.

"Ben is fascinating to play," says Jessup, both for his personal mystery and the whole apocalyptic, video game-style throwdown. "Any 6-year-old wants to be in this story," he says. "Although when you do it, it's different. Every once in a while we'll be sitting there at 4 in the morning, pouring rain, after a 15-hour day, and you forget you're doing a TV show. It's weird in the best possible sense of the word."

In real life, Jessup doesn't have to save the world. But he wouldn't mind conquering a corner of it. "It'd be good to make my first feature film by the time I'm 24," he says, noting that's the age at which Orson Welles made "Citizen Kane," which Jessup calls pretty much the perfect film.

He's got some time. He turned 18 in June and just graduated from high school. It only seems like he's already a veteran writer/producer as well as actor.

"When I was 10," he recalls, "I coerced a few of my friends from the street into doing my remake of 'Goldeneye.' I called it 'Silvereye.' "There wasn't any one moment when I decided this is what I wanted to do, but I sort of knew it from the time I was 11 or 12."

He has produced a number of short films since then, and executive-produced the independent film "Amy George," which played at the 2011 Toronto Film Festival.

This year at Toronto he was named one of four "Rising Stars."

"There's no natural path of ascension for what I want to do," he says. "I have a little file of possible movie ideas. I also need to work with people who have more experience. I need to travel and have more of my own experiences."

"You raise money, you make short films. I'm sure I'll have some failures, and I'll learn. I'm still relatively young."



COMPILED BY MADELEINE MARR FROM MIAMI HERALD STAFF AND WIRE REPORTS

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AS SEEN ON TV

Connor Jessup's only human

Being a teenager is tough. Now try being taken over by an alien. Just ask **Connor Jessup**, who plays Ben Mason on TNT's Sunday night series *Falling Skies*. After being rescued, Ben's on the road to recovery now, as we see in Season 3 of the **Steven Spielberg**-produced sci-fi drama. The Canadian actor, 19, talks about his character's road back to "normalcy" and other stuff.

How does your character develop this season?

Season 2 saw a much colder and darker and more bang-bang Ben than the first season. A cynical side was born from the confusion and chaos of certain chains of events, both on and off screen, both major and minor. In Season 3, having gone through a process of reconciliation (mostly with himself), Ben is significantly more well-adjusted. Living within an expanded structure of a society, as opposed to being on the move, has given Ben the opportunity not just to settle down, but to meet other people who find themselves in similar binds. One of the core themes of this season for every single character is the idea of rebuilding, the shimmering promise of reclaiming and reconstructing something which resembles pre-war life. Ben's movement in this season, like the movement of most characters, is toward that ideal. Whether or not it's feasible is another matter altogether.

What changes can we expect?

Ben is no longer the angst-ridden, existential mope; he's evolved into a unique, effective and stable member of organized military, part of a unit who perform tasks that nobody else is physically capable of. The lone wolf-wannabe, renegade mentality has been tossed out the window. Though he still does wear a lot of black.

What can viewers expect from the plot?

Season 3 vastly expands the scope and reach of the show's mythology. More aliens, more hard-to-pronounce words, a larger theater of combat and operations. In the past, it's been a show about a relatively small group of people in



a single, isolated part of the world fighting against a nameless, faceless enemy. But we are starting to learn things, and this is broadening the range of the show. We start to learn a lot more about the motivations behind the alien invasion and the universal context of it. New allies, new enemies, new drama. Also, we blow a lot of stuff up.

What is the chemistry like on set?

Like a circus family. It's crazy and wonderful, and I feel unfairly lucky to have somehow snuck in under the radar and been allowed to join this wonderful group of

people. I feel like I'm going to be found out any day now. The cast has all been working together for almost four years, and most of the crew for two or three. Also, we spend an unhealthy amount of our free time together as well. They're the weirdest and most diverse lot I've ever met. Basically I'm trying to say I love them all.

What was it like working with Spielberg?

Like most kids in North America, I grew up on a fine diet that was one half food and one half Steven Spielberg movies that were all formative films for me in one way or another. So to be able to be involved in one of his shows is a little dreamy.

Do you have a favorite movie of his?

I would have to say *Empire of the Sun*. I really did laugh and cry when I first saw it, and every time since. It's a magnificent achievement in both grand spectacle filmmaking — those scenes on the streets of Shanghai — and humane and heartbreaking coming-of-age. It's not gritty, it's not violent or brutal like most war movies these days, it wasn't even anything particularly new, but it was stitched together with such energy and skill and love and infectious good humor and quiet humanism. On top of all that, Christian Bale gives one of the greatest child performances of all time.

MADELEINE MARR

calendar

Profile



Connor Jessup: From horses to aliens to juvy

At 13, he became a TV star in *The Saddle Club*. At 15 he produced a feature film. Now he stars in the sci-fi series *Falling Skies*, by executive producer Steven Spielberg.

By Alexandra Heilbron



Connor and *Saddle Club* co-star Lauren Dixon signing autographs

Connor Jessup first gained fame when he was cast in the TV series *The Saddle Club*. Working daily gave Connor focus. "Before that, this business had been more of a hobby, but within those eight months [that it took to film the series] it became the primary focus of my life and it really pushed me in the direction of wanting to be in this business for good," he revealed during an interview with *Tribute*.

Following *The Saddle Club*, Connor attended film camp where he met film school grads. "They had a script called *Amy George* and it was amazing. I wanted to get involved so I donated money and ran around set and did every kind of menial labour job that needed to be done. I think my titles were executive producer/camera assistant. The movie got into TIFF and a bunch of film festivals around the world. It was just a really amazing experience and it introduced me to the world of filmmaking. Not long after that I made my first short."

Connor wrote, produced and directed the six-minute film *I Don't Hurt Anymore!*, about ambition and jealousy and what these emotions can drive people to do.

When asked to describe the film, he admitted, "It's kind of gruesome. I was obsessed with long, continuous shots where tension builds. I think I overdid it a bit! But no one is judging you when you're 16. It's just a great way to experiment and learn."

In 2011, Connor was cast in a lead role as Ben Mason in the series *Falling Skies*, airing in Canada on Super Channel. During the first season, he was rescued from aliens. Connor describes his character: "He's picking up a gun and becoming colder and more distant. He's just really confused and angry but more than anything I think he's afraid of what's happening to him."

Connor has also completed a role in the Canadian movie *Blackbird* (screening at TIFF) as a creative teen whose actions are misunderstood when something he writes is misinterpreted as a "hit list." Connor describes the premise: "He likes this girl, but she has a boyfriend, so when she gives him the cold shoulder in public, it makes him angry. In frustration he writes a short story, which presents a Columbine-esque scenario. The authorities think it's a plan and send him to a juvenile detention centre, but he doesn't fit in. He's naïve, innocent and bookish. It's about how this experience changes everything about him. It's kind of a classic coming-of-age story in an interesting setting."